

EARLY DAYS OF MARYBOROUGH

[By Mr. FIRMIN McKINNON]

(Read by him before the Historical Society of Queensland at a meeting on May 22nd, 1947)

(Maryborough held its Centenary Commemoration in June 1947)

Maryborough, a pretty and prosperous city, 167 miles north of Brisbane, is celebrating its centenary this year. The Centennial Show will be held in the first week in June, and at the same time the "Ball of the Century" is to be held. Other festivities will be held later in the year. As many members of the Historical Society know more about modern Maryborough than I do I shall confine my remarks to the "early days," promising not to stun you with figures or to daze you with official details.

When I was in Maryborough recently I found there was serious disagreement about the date of the centenary, some persons contending that the celebration should have been held three or four years earlier, while others argued that it should be delayed for fourteen years, thus marking 100 years since the town was incorporated in 1861. Pursuing the appeasement policy, I explained to disputants (apparently much to their satisfaction) that it was exceedingly difficult to agree that some particular event marked the starting point of a town, and I quoted Roma which held its centenary a year ago, marking the discovery of Mount Abundance by Sir Thomas Mitchell on May 8th, 1846, whereas Mount Abundance leasehold was not actually taken up by Alan MacPherson till a year later; and the town was not surveyed until 1862 when it was named in honour of the wife of Queensland's first Governor. The town of Gladstone, on the other hand, might have celebrated its centenary on January 30th of this year because Colonel Barney actually proclaimed the new colony of Northern Australia on that day. The new colony, authorised by Mr. William Ewart Gladstone, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, was abandoned a few months later, under orders from his successor in office, Earl Grey, so the town of Gladstone is dating its centenary—and wrongly so I think—from 1854 when Sir Maurice O'Connell (very well known in Queensland's early history) was appointed as Government Resident.

Precisely the same difficulty is being experienced at Maryborough. The first white men to visit the district (apart from Duramboi and Bracefell, two absconding convicts), were Andrew Petrie of Brisbane, Henry Stewart Russell of Cecil Plains, and, later, of Burrandowan and Joliffe, a midshipman, then superintendent for John Eales of Duckenfield, on the Hunter River. They made that journey in search of Davis, better known as Duramboi, who subsequently kept a pottery shop in George Street, Brisbane, out of which he made a fortune. At least he left an estate of more than £10,000 when he died. Duramboi had been with the Wide Bay blacks for some years, but Messrs. Petrie, Russell, and Joliffe, who made their journey in a whale-boat in 1842, were probably the first white men to walk over the present site of the city for Duramboi's country was at Mount Bopple, near Tiaro, some miles down the coast. That date is important for both Russell and Joliffe were keeping their eyes open for "better country further out." A few months later, presumably it was early in 1843 or late in 1842, Joliffe was sent off from the Hunter River with 20,000 sheep and several drays to take up pastoral holdings for Mr. Eales in the new district. He established the head station at Tiaro (about twenty miles from the present city of Maryborough with outstations at Gigoongan, Girkum, and Owanyilla, all a few miles nearer to what is now Maryborough. Like Alan MacPherson's experiment at Mount Abundance it was a failure, a disastrous failure, but it was a courageous failure, and there are times when "high failure overleaps the bounds of low success."

Just as the early history of Roma really starts with the Mount Abundance experiment so the history of Maryborough really dates from the establishment of Eales's stations in 1843. But Maryborough is apparently basing its centenary on the fact that Mr. Surveyor Burnett made a successful survey of the Mary and Burnett Rivers, in June and July 1847. After him the Burnet River was named, and could the city seek greater justification for the date of its establishment than the survey of the river on which it is built!

Several years before Eales's stations were established occurred the wreck of the Stirling Castle on Fraser's Island. That story is related by Stuart Russell in "Genesis of Queensland" but while Russell was mostly accurate in his records of early settlement par-

ticularly on the Downs, he was incorrect in some important details about that wreck. What may be assumed to be the accurate account was told by Lieutenant Otter in a book published in London in 1838. Otter, stationed at the time at "the settlement," at Moreton Bay, says that he received a week's leave of absence to go fishing at Bribie Island, and while there he was approached by two white men whom, at first, he took to be natives—obviously Duramboi and Bracefell. They told him of the wreck of the vessel, the murder of the crew, and the abduction of Mrs. Fraser, the captain's wife. Otter immediately returned to "the settlement," informed the Commandant, Captain Fyans, who ordered out two whaleboats and crews to rescue any survivors. They were accompanied by a man named Graham, a former runaway convict, who had lived for six years with the blacks. They sent Graham to the camp; he talked with the blacks, and brought Mrs. Fraser back to the party who had remained with the whaleboats. Lieutenant Otter says that Mrs. Fraser was in a terrible condition appearing as if she were seventy years instead of thirty-eight. Mrs. Fraser afterwards went to London, seeking to commercialise her adventures, and induced the Lord Mayor of London to open a fund in her behalf. But she had neglected to tell the Lord Mayor that she was now Mrs. Green, having been married to Captain Green, master of the vessel on which she had returned to London. The Mansion House Fund was opened, when an Inspector of Police informed the Lord Mayor that the woman was Mrs. Green. The Fund was closed at once, but Mrs. Fraser (now Mrs. Green) made a statement that she was appealing on behalf of her three children who had remained with friends in Scotland. She received £50 and the balance of £503—immediately collected—was placed in trust for the Fraser children.

That incident is mentioned only incidentally for while it is one of Wide Bay's dramatic happenings I am concerned with the early settlement of what is now Maryborough.

The first station in the district, as I have mentioned, was taken up by Joliffe, on behalf of John Eales, of Duckenfield, on the Hunter River. There are many legends about Eales, but very little information is available that can be treated as authentic. Some twenty years ago, when I had more money, more time, more inclination, and much better health, I spent consider-

able time, in association with the late Mr. Arthur McConnel, son of a pioneer of Durundur, owner of Dugundan, and afterwards a citizen of Clayfield, in trying to get together a few facts that would have a sounder basis than mere legend.

Loyau in his *History of Maryborough*, published in 1897, describes Eales as "first pioneer," stating that he had depastured sheep near the "old township" in 1847. That date appears to be in error by three years at least. Henry Palmer, in his "Reminiscences of Wide Bay," published in Volume 18 of the "Queensland Geographical Journal," says that Eales was on Wide Bay River a year or so earlier than the occupation of the Lower Burnet. That would fix the date round about 1844. In "Australian Men of Mark," Volume 2, page 195, we have the astounding statement that Eales made an expedition to the Mary River in 1839, taking with him a large flock of sheep, and became the first settler in the district. That information (to judge from the detailed family biographical references in it, all of little importance) was probably supplied by Eales's son, John Eales, M.L.C., who was appointed to the New South Wales Legislative Council in December 1880, and died in April 1894. John Eales, the pioneer, died in 1871. To suggest that Eales was here in 1839 is so inaccurate that it need not be seriously considered. As a matter of fact that there is not a scrap of evidence to indicate that Eales himself ever saw the Moreton Bay country.

In 1922, after failing in other directions, we induced Sir Littleton Groom, then Attorney-General of the Commonwealth, to see if he could get from the Chief Secretary's Office in Sydney information that we had failed to get, but which we believed ought to be there; but on November 23rd, 1922, the Under Secretary wrote to Sir Littleton Groom stating that a thorough search had been made of office records, but regretted that nothing could be found, either in correspondence or in the Governor's minutes, that would establish the date when Eales's holdings in Wide Bay district were started.

As every historical researcher knows, some things that were openly talked about a generation ago are now buried deeply as the grave!

In 1851 Mr. J. C. Bidwill, to whom more detailed reference will be made within a few minutes, said in a report to the Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands in

Sydney that he and a party who were on the look out for runs had come upon the Mary River, "near to the place where Mr. Eales's dray had crossed it in 1842."

Now we get something that looks really authentic. In the Mitchell Library in Sydney there is an official report entitled "Journal of Excursion to the Bunya Mountain country, situated twenty-six miles to the North of Moreton Bay district, New South Wales." It was written in 1843, by Stephen Simpson, M.D., formerly a surgeon in the 14th Light Dragoons, who came to Australia in 1842, with a letter from the Duke of Sutherland and Lord John Russell to Sir George Gipps, Governor-in-Chief of New South Wales and Dependencies. Governor Gipps promptly appointed him to be Land Commissioner at Moreton Bay. Dr. Simpson arrived here, made his home at Woolston, near Woogaroo, half way between "The Settlement and Limestone," which you know is now Ipswich.

On March 10th, 1843, accompanied by Mr. Eiper, one of the German missionaries at Zion's Hill (or German Station), and attended by four mounted members of the Border Police, and six prisoners of the Crown, in charge of a bullock dray drawn by ten bullocks, he left Woogaroo to define the northern boundary of his district which, incidentally, was known as "The Limit of Colonisation." As some of Dr. Simpson's place names would be confusing I shall use the names given to me by the late Mr. Arthur McConnel who kindly edited the version that I had copied. Dr. Simpson wrote that "on March 13th (three days out) we encamped at Mr. Eales's station on the Brisbane River." (That, as Mr. McConnel explained, was between Ipswich and Mount Brisbane, and was merely one of Joliffe's extended camping places.) Next day, they were at "Mr. Bigge's sheep station." (Again, parenthetically, and without any blame to Mr. McConnel, let me say that Frederick and Francis Bigge (known to their friends as Bigge and Little Bigge) were nephews of Mr. Commissioner Bigge, that autocrat who clashed so seriously and so nastily with Governor Lachlan Macquarie. Incidentally, Francis Bigge of Mount Brisbane is reported to have spent, rather wasted, £10,000 in trying to make Cleveland the capital of Moreton Bay. I am happy to say, however, that a cousin, Mr. Matthew Bigge, is a member of this society.)

The party crossed from Mount Brisbane to Kilcoy, leased by Sir Evan and Colin McKenzie, and on to

Durundur, leased by David Archer. By some miracle—seek not for miracles only in the Bible—they crossed the Conondale Range and the Great Divide, held a thanksgiving service and finally reached Eales's head station at Tiaro on March 30th (twenty days out) and learned that the schooner, Edward (first to come up the Mary River), was moored in a salt-water creek about twenty-six miles lower down. Dr. Simpson visited the Edward and went on to tidal water.

A minute ago I suggested that records of miracles could be found elsewhere than in the Bible. The crossing of the range dividing Brisbane country from that of the Mary River is an instance. I remember Mr. McConnel telling me that he had never ceased to wonder how an inexperienced party had managed such a feat, and remarking that "about twenty-five years ago (that would have been about 1910), he was able to track the path of the bullock drays by the old tree stumps that had been sawn off about a foot from the ground, and that the blacks frequently showed by their own imitative movements of this old-time incident, then a legend with them, how closely the drays nearly went to disaster. Unfortunately Dr. Simpson was more intent on finding bunya trees than in telling us much about the Eales's settlement. He did not realise that less than three generations later two thoroughly earnest but inexperienced historical researchers would be spending anxious hours and many stamps in trying to find something, well-known to him, which had gone with the old world to the grave.

Unquestionably, however, David McConnel was first on the Upper Brisbane. That was in 1841. He was closely followed by the McKenzies at Kilcoy, by Bigges of Mount Brisbane, by the Balfours of Colinton, and David Archer at Durundur, all before the end of 1841. The Archers were fifth in the Brisbane watershed, the lease afterwards going to John McConnel. And it is a fair assumption that Joliffe, with Eales's sheep and drays, was first into the Wide Bay country, opening the way for John Eaton and Atticus Tooth, for Berkeley Moreton (afterwards Earl of Ducie) and William Henry Walsh of Degilbo; for the McTaggarts and Richard Graham, and many others.

Joliffe, however, soon tired of the excitements caused by wild cattle and still more unpredictable wild blacks, and handed over to Mr. Last. Last's sojourn was very short. The blacks found that sheep were

easier to spear than wallabies and soon the station was abandoned. Failure! Call it failure if you like! Call Alan MacPherson's experiment at Mount Abundance a failure! But don't forget that high failure overleaps the bounds of low success!

Alan MacPherson was followed at Mount Abundance, near Roma, by the Spencers and the township of Roma was established four years later. In the same way Eales's experiment was followed by Edward Aldridge, first white settler at Baddow, now a suburb of Maryborough, by George Furbur who settled at Girkum (Eales's abandoned runs) and by Henry Palmer who arrived with Aldridge. Aldridge and Palmer opened pubs, inns, or shanties as you prefer, very necessary places in those faraway days, as they were always associated with small general stores. Aldridge opened "The Bush Inn" in what is now the old town (that is around Baddow) and Palmer opened another store and inn. Aldridge was a pioneer of the sugar industry, erected that massive tower and peal of bells adjoining St. Paul's Church of England in memory of his wife; and built an hotel in what is now Kent Street (principal street in the city, called after Kent of Kent and Wienholt who succeeded W. H. Walsh at Degilbo). Henry Palmer became first Mayor of Maryborough when the town was incorporated in 1861. He was instrumental with Mr. R. B. Sheridan in securing the start of the botanic gardens, now a particularly beautiful gardens right in the centre of the city, with the finest fernery I have ever seen.

And what of George Furbur? Just a bush worker and teamster, but a man of extraordinary courage and outstanding force of character. He arrived from Ipswich about 1847, opened a store, a shanty, and a make-shift wharf in the old town. If Joliffe had had the luck to find a man of Furbur's indomitable character it is safe to say that the name of Eales would be better known in Maryborough's history than it is. When he was erecting his wharf a blackfellow, working for him, chopped Furbur's skull with a squaring axe and another killed his white mate with a morticing axe. (Both varieties of axe can be seen in the society's museum. But that is just a cheap advertisement for the museum). By a miracle Furbur regained consciousness, caught a horse, and rode to Ipswich where his frightful wound was dressed by Dr. Dorsay. He recovered, returned to old Maryborough, shot the black-

fellow who had chopped him down (and legend says that he shot several others). But the blacks had the last word in the dispute. They murdered him and his son-in-law in 1850. Incidentally, Mrs. Furbur was the first white woman in the old township.

Now I come to a man who is more worthy of remembrance. He is John Carne Bidwill. Records in the Mitchell Library show that he was born in Exeter in 1815 (incidentally, the year of the Battle of Waterloo). He arrived in Sydney in September 1838. In the following year he was in New Zealand collecting botanical specimens for Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker of Kew Gardens. Later, when that distinguished botanist came to early Sydney Mr. Bidwill accompanied him and obtained for him a lot of rare botanical specimens. On September 1, 1847, he was appointed first Director of the Botanic Gardens in Sydney, but through some misunderstanding, due partly to indifference, and partly to the very slow communications of that time the Secretary of State for the Colonies had appointed Mr. Charles Moore. (He was, I fear, not a very distinguished botanist for my records tell me nothing about him, but that, again is parenthetical: in the presence of Mr. C. T. White, our own distinguished botanist, almost an "aside"). On the arrival in Sydney of Mr. Moore, Mr. Bidwill, of course, had to relinquish that post, but he was appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands at Wide Bay a task which I should think an eminent botanist and friend of Hooker's was hopelessly unsuited to fill. Perchance, Mr. White will agree!

G. W. Dart, a nephew of Bidwill's, was able, some years ago, to supplement the few official details and a special biographic notice by the late Mr. J. H. Maiden in the "Journal of the Royal Society of New South Wales, Volume 42, 1903, almost all that I had been able to procure. Dart arrived in Maryborough from Sydney by the small schooner, Liberty, in March 1850, and worked for Bidwill on his farm-garden on Tinana Creek. Bidwill, he says, was Chief Magistrate and Commissioner of Crown Lands. In 1851 Bidwill was instructed by the Government of New South Wales to find a shorter route from the Mary River to Brisbane (Mr. McConnel told me that the old road went via Baramba and Nanango, the Upper Brisbane and Ipswich). Mr. Bidwill took a bullock dray with him and a man named Slade. When near Gympie, not yet discovered, they had to bridge a deep creek and while fos-

sicking about in the creek Mr. Bidwill discovered gold. Mr. Dart says that he himself actually saw the gold. That was six years before Nash discovered gold at Nash's Creek, now in the very heart of the town. But Bidwill was not interested in gold. He was a scientist. He ran the road successfully to the head of the Mary River; and as provisions were short he and Slade started off for Durundur. Bidwill had forgotten his compass and at the top of the range, in the dense scrub, he and Slade became hopelessly bushed. (Only those who have been lost, even for a few minutes in a small dense scrub, can appreciate what that means.) They wandered about for eight days, doubtless wandering circuitously, and living on the edible berries that Bidwill was able to find. Almost at the stage of exhaustion they were found by some blacks who took them to Durundur. Bidwill rested there for a time and then went on to Sydney, but returned to die at Tinana Creek on March 10th, 1853. On his farm he had a very beautiful garden and around his grave where he was buried on Tinana Creek were planted four mango trees—perhaps the first mango trees ever planted in Queensland outside a garden.

When I was in Maryborough recently, and unable to get any details of the Bidwill farm or grave, the local newspaper kindly let me state those facts, and other details about old Maryborough, and to ask if anybody knew who had Bidwill's farm and what of the grave? Two days later the newspaper published a letter from Mr. D. J. Cran of Bidwill, Tinana, stating that he held Bidwill's old farm and that the grave with its tombstone was on the property. "The inscription on the tombstone," he wrote, "is still decipherable but it is showing signs of wear. The mango trees are dead, but one magnificent specimen was growing until a few years ago."

Before ending the Bidwill record there is a matter that needs some attention. I have heard persons, who never knew of Bidwill other than as a name, say that he had stolen some honour that belonged to Andrew Petrie. Andrew Petrie unquestionably discovered the bunya trees, but did not know what they were so he gave some of the cones to Bidwill who promptly recognised them as cones from a pine but different from the bunya pine of South America. Bidwill therefore got some seedlings and sent them to Hooker who, with the approval of the Linnaen Society, gave the tree the

name of *Auricaria Bidwilli*, otherwise the Pine of Bidwill. Mr. J. H. Maiden, in describing the incident to the Royal Society of New South Wales, said, "We know it as the Bunya Bunya, but Bidwill originally gave the name as Bunya-Tunza or Bunya-Tunya. It is found in the Mount Brisbane range of hills, seventy miles north of what was called Moreton Bay settlement. Bidwill did not ask that his name should be associated with it; but, clearly, Mr. Petrie knew nothing about the tree!

Another man who did a great amount of work for early Maryborough, a name now almost forgotten, was Richard Brinsley Sheridan, grandfather of Mrs. Stable, wife of Professor Stable of the Queensland University. The Christian names, Richard Brinsley, will indicate to you that he belonged to the same clan as Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the great orator of the House of Commons in the days of Pitt, Fox, Burke, and other great celebrities. Our Richard Brinsley Sheridan arrived in Sydney in 1842 when he was twenty years of age, and was appointed by the Imperial Government to H.M. Customs. In 1853 he was promoted to the Brisbane department; and immediately after Separation at the end of 1859, he was appointed by the first Queensland Government to be Chief Officer of Customs at Maryborough as well as Police Magistrate, Harbour Master, and several other more or less important posts. Thus early in its career did the Queensland Government set about loading one official with several executive positions! In 1883, he resigned and entered Parliament as member for Maryborough. Politics evidently ran in the blood of the Sheridan family. In 1866 he took office in the first Griffith Ministry as Postmaster-General, one of his colleagues being Berkeley Moreton, afterwards Earl of Ducie, then owner of Wetheron station near Gayndah. He was instrumental in advancing a lot of civic movements in Maryborough, among them being the Botanic Gardens, he and Palmer the first Mayor having put much hard spade work into it. He was also a trustee and member of the board of management of the Botanic Gardens in Brisbane. He put so much real work, too, into the early defence movement in Queensland that in 1884 he was appointed as Hon. Lieutenant-General on the retired list.

Many members of this society probably know more about Walkers Ltd. than I do so I will say nothing about that great firm beyond the remark that it was

founded by John Walker who came up from Ballarat in the early sixties. The remarkable development of the firm that has more than 2,000 employees on its pay roll has been of comparatively recent years.

The immense sawmilling firm of Wilson, Hart, and Co. was started away back in the sixties by Messrs. Wilson, Hart, and Bartholomew. I am mentioning that firm merely because Mr. Wilson, a very generous man, was president or member of nearly every committee that was formed away back in the nineties with the object of boosting Maryborough. He built a very beautiful house called Doon Villa, now surrounded by a magnificent garden; and on part of that land is one of the prettiest bowling greens in Maryborough, on land especially set apart for that purpose by Mr. Wilson.

I shall conclude this survey by mentioning a man who carried the name of Maryborough to limits far outside the colony of Queensland, although it is quite pardonable if you have not heard his name—I am sure that comparatively few in Maryborough know anything about him. I refer to John Knight, Maryborough's patriotic poet, mentioned by Professor Stable in "A Book of Queensland Verse," and described by Henry Arthur Kellow, in "Queensland Poets," as "ultimus Romanorum," (the last of the Romans) a reference, of course, to his being the last of the fervent patriotic poets.

John Knight, born in Devonshire five years before Victoria came to the Throne, had no school education. As a boy he worked for a stonemason; threw down his tools when rumours arose of the coming Crimean War and joined the English Navy. He served in the Baltic, in the Mediterranean, and on various other stations, and at the age of forty-two he found himself in Queensland and drifted to Maryborough where he lived until his death about fifty years ago. His poems were published in 1894 in a volume entitled "One People, One Destiny and Other Poems," and they stamp him as being essentially English and fervently patriotic. He was a hater of "isms"; pessimism, agnosticism, socialism. Old John Knight wanted none of them. He was a champion of the old loyalties, of old battleships, old officers, old messmates, the old flag, the old land.

Knight saw the march of time but could not understand the march of thought: he could not understand that the ideas of one generation may honestly be regarded by some persons of the next generation as hope-

lessly wrong. Had he lived in these days he would have had no time for Sovietism, for Stalinism, or for Communism, and nobody dare tell him that Britain's star is declining. He was contemporary with John Henry Nicholson of Brisbane, better known as Halek; with Charles Frederick Chubb of Ipswich, with Alfred Midgely of Toowoomba, but apart from Brunton Stephens he was the only poet of the 'nineties to sing of the coming Federation of the Australian colonies, and to sing of it not merely as an Australian guiding star, but as an Empire ideal. Self-taught John Knight: his passion was patriotism. John Knight, ultimus Romanorum, it is a pity that some of our more cultured poets of to-day do not occasionally catch a flash of his optimistic fervour!

All these men, yes, even old John Knight, and many more than those mentioned, helped to lay down the foundation stone upon which the destiny of modern Maryborough has been based.

And what of modern Maryborough, the city of bicycles? It is a beautiful little city, with wide well-kept streets, handsome public and private gardens that are ablaze with crotons, acalaphas, and other bright shrubs. Every homestead seems to have its garden plot, and every lawn appears to be regularly mown. The School of Arts, the schools and the hospital are the pride of the city while the bicycle, for men and women, for girls and boys, and even for babies, seems to be the cheap and chosen method of locomotion, directed twice a day by the police.

But as I said earlier in this paper many of you know much more about modern Maryborough than I do. My part was to tell you something of the real pioneers. It may have sounded very prosaic—

But lo, a miracle! the land
But yesterday was all unknown;
The wild man's boomerang was thrown
Where now great busy cities stand,

A miracle! Figuratively, I give you the toast of those men and women who made it.

To them who fought the wilderness through rough unsettled years.

The founders of our nation's life—the brave old pioneers.

No braver story, sir, than theirs was ever told on Grecian urn or Roman arch.